



Transition

Best Practice Update

Preparing Students with Disabilities for College

This is the first in a four-part series of *Transition Best Practice Updates* (January – April 2001) focusing on preparing students with disabilities for post-secondary academic settings.

Making the choice for a post-secondary education for students with disabilities can be a challenging task when the process first begins. There are a number of options for students to look at including two and four-year public and private colleges and universities, technical colleges, trade schools and some non-degree programs. In addition, students must factor in the need for financial aid, degree programs offered, reason for attending college, location and access. The decision to start investigating colleges should begin during the junior year of high school when career exploration can be matched with both the high school program and programs offered at post-secondary institutions. Though this is an important avenue to follow, students must also consider their disability and learning styles, support services received in high school and the support services offered to students with disabilities at the colleges they are investigating. This publication, *Transition Best Practice Updates*, will focus on preparing students with disabilities for post secondary academic settings over the next four issues (January – April 2001) and concentrate on the following topics:

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| January 2001 | Differences between High School and College, Section 504 |
| February 2001 | Types of ND Post-Secondary Options and Visiting the Campus |
| March 2001 | Planning and Preparation |
| April 2001 | Self-Advocacy & What to do When You Get to College |

The past decade has seen more students with disabilities graduate from high school to advance their studies at the college and university level. Preparing students who receive special education for college requires knowledge of the legal protections, self-advocacy, and implementation of the support services available from each campus. Successful transition to any post secondary setting begins in high school. There is a significant difference between high school and college in many ways as described below:

| | High School | College |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Teacher Contact | Teacher/student contact close and frequent (5 days/week). | Instructor/student contact more difficult to arrange and less frequent (1-3 times/week). |
| New Status | Student establishes a personal status in academic and social activity based on family and community factors. | Student is in a new situation where there is little carry over of either family or community reputation. |
| Counseling | Counseling by teachers or counselors is personalized. Guidance personnel more available. Parental contact is constant. | Counseling must be sought by students and is less available. Parental contact much more difficult and limited if student is living away from home. |
| Dependence | Student told what to do in most situations. Follow up on instructions is often the rule. | Student is on his own. Self-discipline is required. |
| Motivation | Students get support and encouragement to achieve or participate from parents, teachers or counselors. | Student must supply own motivation. |
| Freedom | Supervised by parents, teachers daily. | Student has freedom and responsibility for actions. |
| Distractions | Partially controlled by school and home. | Many distractions and opportunities for nonproductive activities. |

In addition to the differences described above for all students, there are further differences between high school and college for students with disabilities. While in high school, students receiving special education are protected by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the federal regulations enforced by the ND Department of Public Instruction, Office of Special Education. Services and goals are identified by an annual individualized education program (IEP) and a team of people with specific expertise. In college, there is no IEP; protections are provided by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which is a civil rights protection, not an educational law.

In high school, educators identified students who had a disability and needed specialized instruction, services and supports. In college, any individual with a disability who wants academic accommodations must self disclose both the disability and the need for accommodations. In high school, both accommodations (extended test time, alternate environment) and modifications (less material, different curriculum) were available to students with disabilities. In college, only accommodations are available; academic modifications are not available. In summary, public high schools have the responsibility of educational benefit, while colleges and universities have the responsibility of educational access.

Generally, in high school self-advocacy is a practice in progress; students display ranges from independence to reliance on teachers, parents and the IEP team. The diversity among students to understand their disability, its educational implications, identification of accommodations and modifications is immense. In high school, the educational system offers procedural safeguards, and while colleges also must adhere to certain procedural safeguards such as confidentiality and privacy, there are limitations to what they are required to offer. In college, self-advocacy is critical to success; parents play a minimal, at best, role with administration or staff as their son or daughter is now of legal age and considered an adult who must exercise independence and leadership initiating services. College students with disabilities must self advocate, identify and understand their disability and its educational implications and necessary accommodations. In college, it is also necessary to know the procedural safeguards of Section 504 and ADA.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 –

In 1973 Congress passed Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of physical or mental disability. It states:

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States ... shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance...

Section 504 applies to all recipients of this funding, including colleges, universities and post secondary vocational education and adult education programs. Title II of the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibits state and local governments from discriminating on the basis of disability and enforces Title II in public colleges, universities and graduate and professional schools.

IDEA vs. §504

| ISSUE | IDEA | §504/ADA |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Type of Statute | Federal mandate provides funding to states to ensure provision of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for children with disabilities | Civil Rights statute protecting persons with disabilities from discrimination (unfunded mandate) |
| Main Provision | Establishes procedural safeguards and the right to free appropriate public education in the Least Restrictive Environment | Because of disability, a qualified person can't be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • excluded from participation in, • denied the benefits of, or • be subjected to discrimination by any service, program or activity of a postsecondary institution |
| Who is Protected | Children falling into 13 categories listed in IDEA and requiring special educational services to benefit from an education | Any person with a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits a major life activity e.g., walking, seeing, hearing, breathing, learning, etc.; <u>OR</u> has a record of such an impairment; <u>OR</u> is perceived as having such an impairment |
| Extent of Obligation | Free Appropriate Public Education ensuring a meaningful benefit from an education | Equivalent <i>access</i> to educational and extracurricular programs |
| Delivery Method | Individualized Education Plan (IEP) | No formal plan, worked out on case-by-case basis with the institution's Disability Student Services office |
| Enforcement | Mediation, Complaint or Due Process | Internal grievance procedures OR complaint filed with Office for Civil Rights (OCR) |
| Funding | Federal funds to states to support special education programs | No funding attached; cost are incurred by the institution |
| Available Services | Supplemental Aids and Services; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupational Therapy • Speech & Language • Counseling • Tutoring / Resource Room • Paraeducators • Testing modifications • Adaptive equipment | Reasonable academic accommodations and adjustments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpreters • Notetakers • Test accommodations or adaptations • Priority registration |
| Student's Responsibility | Do one's best | Disclose disability; provide documentation; facilitate reasonable accommodations; use accommodations appropriately; speak up if trouble arises, no statutory mechanism requiring parental involvement |

Post Secondary Institutions are NOT required to:

- Reduce or waive any of the essential requirements of the course or a program
- Conduct testing and assessment of a learning, psychological or medical disabilities
- Provide personal attendees
- Provide personal or private tutors
- Prepare IEP's or Section 504 plans

Differences between two-year and four-year post secondary institutions

Two-year Institutions

- Open enrollment
- Provide developmental courses and curriculum
- Provide academic support services through labs and peer study groups

Four-year Institutions

- Admission requirements
- No developmental courses unless part of a federal grant program
- Varied support structures

DISABILITY SUPPORT OFFICES

Every college and/or university is required by law to provide services and accommodations to students with disabilities. Each college may call their services or office by different names. For example, you may see, hear or read about disability support services, student services, academic learning center or special needs office. The names may be different, but the services are generally the same.

The decision to disclose your disability is a very personal matter and varies from individual to individual. Some students believe they can successfully compensate for their disabilities; and although admirable, it can also backfire if you fail an exam. As a general rule, it is better to disclose to professors and to do so early in the semester, rather than to risk saying nothing about the disability. Your relationship with the Disability Support Services staff at the college/university is key to working with your professors and identifying appropriate accommodations.

Be aware of your strengths and challenges; know what kinds of assistance have been helpful in the past, your academic strengths, courses you liked and didn't like, accomplishments, interests and hobbies. To receive the maximum services and assistance, you need to acquaint yourself with the staff and share your needs and expectations. While visiting any college campus, an appointment with the disability support services office will be beneficial. You will want to interview the college to determine the following:

- What are the program goals and objectives?
- How many students with disabilities on campus?
- What services are provided? Is there a charge for services? How do I receive such services?
- What records or documentation of a disability are necessary and how recent must they be to be accepted by your office?

- What training has your staff received?
- Is tutoring and/or counseling provided on a one-to-one basis or in a group? How frequently is this available?
- Will the college provide the specific accommodations that I need? What modifications have faculty been willing to make for students with disabilities on this campus?
- Are support groups available?

Auxiliary Aids

It is the college and university responsibility to provide auxiliary aids and services in a timely manner to ensure effective participation by students with disabilities. A student with a disability who is in need of auxiliary aids is obligated to provide notice of the nature of the disability and assist in identifying appropriate and effective auxiliary aids. Colleges and universities may ask the student to provide supporting diagnostic test results and professional recommendations for auxiliary aids. Some of the most common auxiliary aids include taped texts, notetakers, interpreters, Braille calculators, and assistive listening systems. The cost of auxiliary aids is the responsibility of the institution. Personal aids and services, including help in bathing, dressing, or other personal care, are not required to be provided by postsecondary institutions.

No services can be granted to a student who does not identify him/herself to the Disability Support Services office on campus or who does not provide adequate proof of a disability.

In conclusion, for high school students with disabilities to prepare for college, it is critical for them to understand the differences in the laws governing the secondary and post secondary. College and universities are mandated to provide equal access to programs and facilities, not ensure student success. Students must take responsibility of initiating request for accommodations and disclose the disability – not the parent or high school personnel. Teaching students to be a self-advocate is the greatest gift towards a successful future.

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